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NEWS MEDIA CONTACT:
Ethan Huffman, (208) 521-0370, ethan.huffman@inl.gov

INL nuclear materials detection technology wins national security award

WASHINGTON, D.C. – New technology under development at Idaho National Laboratory has been proven to safely detect hidden nuclear materials smuggled into ports and across borders. Now, the research being conducted by a team of INL and Idaho Accelerator Center engineers has earned the 2008 \$25,000 Homeland Security Award sponsored by the Christopher Columbus Fellowship Foundation and AgustaWestland North America, Inc.

This summer, the researchers, led by INL's Dr. James Jones, developed a prototype long-range, nonintrusive nuclear materials detection technology called the Photonuclear Inspection and Threat Assessment System (PITAS). PITAS, a breakthrough in homeland security technology, is a linear accelerator-based device that uses high-energy photons to induce fission and identify delayed neutron and gamma rays consistent with illicit nuclear materials. These rays are analyzed by a series of detectors, which alert operators to the presence of the materials. The technology performs this process within minutes, while leaving no residual environmental impact.

In announcing the award, Kimberly Owens, the chair of the Foundation, said, "Thousands of tons of cargo move through U.S. ports daily with little or no inspection. The Christopher Columbus Foundation and AgustaWestland are pleased to recognize Dr. Jones and his team for their work on the development of a nuclear materials detection system to facilitate the inspection of cargo containers for illicit nuclear material."

"As a life-long scientist and inventor, I have been very fortunate to have worked on technology like the PITAS system that has the potential to save lives and combat terrorism," said Jones. "This is something that the Christopher Columbus Fellowship Foundation and AgustaWestland North America have recognized, and I am honored to accept this award."

The Christopher Columbus Fellowship Foundation is an independent federal agency established by Congress in 1992 to encourage and support the development of technology that benefits mankind. The foundation's board and members of the award selection committee are presidential appointees. AgustaWestland North America, Inc. is one of the nation's largest manufacturers of law enforcement and military helicopters.

The award's ceremony will take place this evening in the U.S. Capitol Building.

[Read the PITAS fact sheet.](#)

[Read an INL feature story about the accomplishment.](#)

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